

Routledge Studies in Islamic Philosophy

BECOMING A GENUINE MUSLIM

KIERKEGAARD AND MUHAMMAD IQBAL

Sevcan Ozturk



Becoming a Genuine Muslim

Despite the apparent lack of any cultural and religious connection between Kierkegaard and Iqbal, their philosophical and religious concerns and their methods of dealing with these concerns show certain parallels.

This book provides a Kierkegaardian reading of Muhammad Iqbal's idea of becoming a genuine Muslim. It reflects on the parallels between the philosophical approaches of Kierkegaard and Iqbal, and argues that, though there are certain parallels between their approaches, there is a significant difference between their philosophical stances. Kierkegaard was concerned with developing an existential dialectics; Iqbal, however, focused mostly on the identification of the problems of the modern Muslim world. As a result, Iqbal's idea of becoming a genuine Muslim – the practical aspect of his thought and one of the most central issues of his philosophy – seems to be unclear and even contradictory at points. This book therefore uses the parallels between the two philosophers' endeavours and the notions developed by Kierkegaard to provide a strong hermeneutical tool for clarifying where the significance of Iqbal's idea of becoming a Muslim lies.

By bringing together two philosophers from different cultural, traditional and religious backgrounds, this book will appeal to students and scholars of Comparative Politics, Contemporary Islamic Philosophy and the Philosophy of Religion.

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Contents

<i>Preface</i>	vi
<i>List of abbreviations</i>	ix
1 Introduction	1
2 The construction of a Kierkegaardian hermeneutics	22
3 Iqbal in context	53
4 Making distinctions	81
5 Cultivating existential appropriation on the part of the reader	111
6 Conclusion	137
<i>Index</i>	143

Preface

The philosophical deliberations of Kierkegaard and Iqbal respectively have parallels in certain regards and yet, in spite of this, surprisingly little work has been done on the relationship and implications that may be drawn from their work being compared and contrasted. This book has as its principle that of applying a Kierkegaardian hermeneutics, which itself gives a particular emphasis to the subject of becoming a religious self, to Iqbal's discussion of becoming a Muslim self. Kierkegaard paid much attention to the developing of a dialectics and is rigorous in this endeavour; Iqbal, on the other hand, focused mostly on the identification of the problems of the Muslim world of his day, so he chose to remain actively engaged in the political and social issues of the Muslims of India. The main result of this is that Iqbal does not provide his readers with a clear idea of how to become a Muslim despite the fact that it is perhaps the core of his philosophical thought. This book aims to identify and dispel the issues caused by the inconsistencies and lack of clarity in Iqbal's philosophical thought which are partly the results of his particular interest in the identification of the problems rather than providing concrete solutions for them. This will be achieved through the application of the Kierkegaardian techniques and concepts to Iqbal's discussions. Therefore, the intention of this book is to make a contribution in three directions: (1) to the academic literature on Iqbal, a field which, with a few notable exceptions, is lacking in analytical and critical studies; (2) to Kierkegaard studies, by juxtaposing Kierkegaard with a philosopher from the Muslim world, who has, largely, not been taken seriously by Western philosophy and who deserves to be taken more seriously; (3) to intercultural studies, by reflecting on the common ground of a philosophical project in spite of religious and cultural differences.

After a review of literature on Iqbal, and also on what has been written about him in relation to Kierkegaard, there is an attempt to construct a Kierkegaardian hermeneutics, the establishment of which incorporates the main principles of Kierkegaard's philosophical method. Iqbal is then set in his cultural and philosophical context, with a focus on his view of the problems of the modern Muslim world of his day and his solutions for them. The remainder of the book is concerned with the application of Kierkegaardian hermeneutics to the main points of Iqbal's discussion of the development of the self

and specifically of the genuine Muslim self. This requires the making of certain distinctions between concepts, and also the cultivation of an existential appropriation on the part of the reader. Concepts which led to ambiguity in his work and particularly in his idea of becoming a genuine Muslim, are identified and then clarified with the help of Kierkegaard's theory of making distinctions. Iqbal's understanding of the existential character of Islam is identified with the help of a number of Kierkegaardian notions, and the role of this existential character of Islam is discussed in relation to becoming a genuine Muslim. Lastly, the concepts which were clarified through the principle of making distinctions and other Kierkegaardian notions, such as religiousness and the spheres of existence, are applied to Iqbal's discussion of the existential character of Islam.

In this book, which originally was in the form of a PhD dissertation, I have chosen to write in a depersonalized style for the sake of clarity and precision. Occasionally I have given examples which have required the use of the first person singular or plural. I have also cited the name of the work itself instead of using 'ibid.' in referencing the works of Kierkegaard and Iqbal, again, for the sake of clarity. In referencing secondary resources, however, I have used 'ibid.' to avoid duplicating the same reference details. Although all of Iqbal's poetry has been translated into English, and a few works have been rendered into Turkish, I have made a point of checking the Persian text in cases where I needed to examine the details of technical terms, e.g. where the translations might be ambiguous, or where the published translation is inadequate. Although Iqbal is widely known as a 'philosopher-poet', and although most of his authorship consists of poetry, he presents his philosophical discussions mainly in his prose works, including newspaper articles. I have referred to only a couple of his poems in which he raises philosophical discussions and notions that are significant and relevant to the subject of the individual's becoming a genuine Muslim self. And finally, in this book I would wish to adopt a gender-neutral style using 'he', 'him' or 'himself' when talking about the 'individual' and the 'human being', and using the word 'man' as a term beyond gender.

I would like to thank my supervisors Professor David R. Law and Professor Alan Williams for their full support and expert guidance throughout my PhD research at the University of Manchester. I am also grateful to Professor Oliver Leaman for encouraging me in publishing my research as a book, and also I am thankful for his support, guidance, understanding and kindness throughout this book project. I would like to extend my appreciation to Professor Abraham H. Khan for all the inspiring conversations we had on Iqbal, and for his feedback on my dissertation. I also would like to thank Iqbal Academy Pakistan for providing a huge collection of Iqbal's poetry in English without which this study would probably have been an overwhelming pursuit.

I owe an immense depth of gratitude to my family for their continuous prayers that kept me motivated. I would like to express my deepest appreciation to my beloved husband, Fahri, who deserves my heartfelt gratitude for his

unwavering support and understanding throughout our life together. And finally, my lovely daughter, Asude, deserves my deepest gratitude for sharing every single minute of the first fifteen months of her life with me at my office at the university, for joining me in almost every academic event I attended for the last three years, and for being such a calm girl especially at academic occasions.

Abbreviations*

<i>CUP</i>	<i>Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments</i> (1846), 2 volumes (vol. 1 text; vol. 2 supplement and notes), ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).
<i>JP</i>	<i>Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers</i> , 5 vols, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1967–1978). Cited by volume number and entry number.
<i>PC</i>	<i>Practise in Christianity</i> (1850), ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).
<i>PF</i>	<i>Philosophical Fragments</i> (1844), ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985).
<i>POV</i>	<i>The Point of View for My Work as an Author</i> (written 1848; unpub. in Kierkegaard's lifetime), ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).

Note

* These abbreviations are used only in the Note sections.



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1 Introduction

In this book the overall aim is to provide a Kierkegaardian reading of Muhammad Iqbal's idea of becoming a self, particularly a Muslim self. At first sight this may seem to be a surprising project. Kierkegaard (1813–1855), after all, was a nineteenth-century Danish Christian thinker, whereas Iqbal (1877–1938) was a twentieth-century thinker living in British-ruled India. Furthermore, Kierkegaard only very occasionally refers to Islam,¹ while Iqbal makes no mention of Kierkegaard in his works despite being in close contact with European thought and talking about many of the major European and American philosophers.² Despite the apparent lack of connection between Kierkegaard and Iqbal, there are, however, good reasons to deal with these two thinkers as a research topic. First, there have been very few critical studies of Iqbal's philosophy. This book will attempt to rectify this state of affairs by providing a critical analysis of Iqbal's notion of the self. Since Iqbal develops his notion of the self in part in dialogue with existentialist thinkers, notably Nietzsche,³ it makes sense to apply to Iqbal's thought the profound analysis of becoming a religious self provided by the 'father of existentialism', namely Kierkegaard. Second, although this book aims primarily at shedding light on Iqbal's thought, it also makes a contribution to Kierkegaard research. In the voluminous secondary literature on Kierkegaard there have been very few studies aimed at developing a relationship between Kierkegaard and any thinker belonging to a different tradition or religion, particularly to Islam.⁴ The fact that there is not much written on Iqbal and Kierkegaard in these respects indicates that there is a significant gap in the literature. Despite the fact that there have been a vast number of studies on each of these thinkers separately, there are only three published works dealing with them together. Only one author, Ghulam Sabir, has penned a long comparative study on Iqbal and Kierkegaard, and one other, Abraham H. Khan, published two articles on these two thinkers in English. Sabir published a book entitled *Kierkegaard and Iqbal: Startling Resemblances* in 2003.⁵ However, as the title clearly suggests, the work focuses on comparing Iqbal and Kierkegaard, and finding similarities between these two thinkers. It does not, as such, apply Kierkegaardian insights to the interpretation of Iqbal. Khan, on the other hand, has authored two articles on Iqbal and Kierkegaard. One of these articles, entitled 'Kierkegaard and Iqbal on Becoming a Genuinely Existing Self', has been published

2 Introduction

among the proceedings of the annual meeting of the Kierkegaard, Religion, and Culture Group and the Søren Kierkegaard Society in 2007.⁶ This article is the basis for Khan's more recent paper on Iqbal and Kierkegaard entitled 'Muhammad Iqbal and Kierkegaard's "Judge William"'.⁷ They show that there is not much secondary literature available that analyses Iqbal and Kierkegaard and that, what there is, it is inadequate in some respects on Iqbal and Kierkegaard. This book aims to rectify this deficiency.

The third and perhaps most important reason for undertaking this study is that Kierkegaard and Iqbal are addressing similar problems. They both aim at purifying religion from 'alien' elements. Christianity, for Kierkegaard, must be distinguished from the other phenomena that had been associated and confused with it such as Hegelianism, which had reduced Christianity to an inferior form of philosophy. Kierkegaard is also concerned to distinguish Christianity from the social norms of society and from simply being human. That is, in Kierkegaard's works there is found an early critique of what would later be called 'culture Protestantism', the confusion and conflation of Christianity with the dominant norms and values of contemporary society.⁸ Iqbal's thought includes a parallel set of concerns. Like Kierkegaard with regard to Christianity, Iqbal holds that Islam has been confused and conflated with non-Islamic ideas that undermine the true character of the faith. For Iqbal, the elements from which religion must be purified are Greek thought and Islamic mysticism, which in his view undermine the significance of human existence. Their critique of the contemporary forms of their respective religions in turn led both Kierkegaard and Iqbal to be critical of the religious authorities who had allowed such a lamentable state of affairs to come about. Both thinkers call for return to the original sources of Christianity and Islam respectively.

A closer examination of the methods Kierkegaard and Iqbal use in regard to these problems reveals another parallel, namely that they both attempt to deal with their concerns in similar ways. These similarities can be found in their literary technique, their emphasis on taking human existence as the starting point for their reflections, and their development of a notion of the self. It is their common concerns, and the parallel methods adopted by Kierkegaard and Iqbal in order to address these concerns, that seem to allow undertaking a comparative study of Iqbal and Kierkegaard. However, anyone attempting to undertake a comparative study of Iqbal and Kierkegaard, particularly of their understanding of the notion of the self, faces the problem that Iqbal seems not to plan the details of his philosophy of the self in a clear way as Kierkegaard does. In Khan's words, Iqbal presents the notion of the self 'as emerging through relation, as corresponding with consciousness of itself, and as becoming. But he does not seem to map out details of the relation as Kierkegaard does.'⁹ As a result, Iqbal's philosophy of the self is problematized by a terminology that is not perfectly fit for the purpose. What seems to be most important for Iqbal is the identification of the problems of the Muslim world in the modern era. As Ebrahim Moosa nicely puts it, 'He was more interested in pushing the boundaries of thought by raising still more questions to highlight some interminable

problems.’¹⁰ Even if it was deliberate as Moosa claims¹¹ or not, the main result of this is that Iqbal does not provide his readers with a clear idea of how to become a Muslim self despite the fact that it is perhaps the core of his philosophical thought.

Iqbal’s philosophy aims at dispelling the problems of the modern Muslim world by reconstructing Islamic thought and creating a new world. As it is hoped will become clear in the course of this study, Iqbal focuses on this motivation and seeks an urgent way to make this purpose real in a most ambitious manner. He believes that in order to create his ideal world there are many urgent issues ranging from politics and economics to education that need to be dealt with. He had a very wide philosophical knowledge, and showed his ability to use this knowledge in what he wrote. One of the main features of Iqbal’s thought that distinguishes it from others is, in Charles Taylor’s words, that he

manages to establish a mutual and fruitful exchange between thinkers and texts that are quite distant from each other: Nietzsche and Bergson, Hallaj and Rumi, and between those and still others, taken up in the context of rereading the Quran.¹²

Iqbal is not only successful at cultivating fruitful conversations between different thinkers in different contexts, he also presents an unusual ability to establish a connection between modern Western philosophy and traditional Islamic thought. In other words, he successfully deals with modern discussions in an Islamic context. An example of this can be seen in his discussion of the notion of action. Iqbal discusses the notion of action in Hegelian and Kantian contexts and with references to dualism and mechanistic understanding of action,¹³ but he also discusses it with references to the Qur’anic verses. He establishes a relationship between human actions and the development of personality, he even invents the notions of ‘ego-sustaining action’ and ‘ego-dissolving action’, and introduces human actions as the means of achieving immortality promised by the Qur’an.¹⁴ The examination of his philosophy of action would be the subject of a whole other study. However, it should be noted that, although his discussion of action involves ambiguities at some points, the relationship he establishes between actions and the development of the self as an ultimate aim of Islam can actually be regarded as a significant contribution to contemporary philosophy of action, which currently seems to neglect Islamic contributions to the concept.¹⁵ The main problem with Iqbal’s presentation of his philosophy, particularly in terms of the practical aspect of it, is that his terminology is not up to the task and sometimes creates problems for his aim of the ‘reconstruction’ of Islamic religious thought. In spite of this, the parallels mentioned are thought to provide sufficient justification for the application of aspects of Kierkegaard’s thought to Iqbal’s. Despite his rejection of any kind of system and his avoiding of defining his own terms directly, it is the contention of this book that the concepts Kierkegaard develops, and his wish to develop a consistent terminology, provide a powerful hermeneutic

4 Introduction

both for interpreting Iqbal's thought and for making clear where the significance of Iqbal's conception of the self lies.

The feasibility of providing a Kierkegaardian reading of Iqbal is supported by the fact that I am not the first to have undertaken such a project. The next task here is therefore to review the literature that has addressed the questions with which this study is concerned. First, this will expose the philosophical inadequacy of much of the secondary literature on Iqbal, which makes necessary the type of philosophical analysis that will be undertaken in the subsequent chapters. Second, it will set the scene for the discussion by considering the few studies of the relation between Iqbal and Kierkegaard that have appeared thus far.

A critical survey of selected secondary literature on Iqbal

Previously it was mentioned that although there is much written material on Iqbal, these works are rarely critical, objective and analytical. The two main characteristics of such uncritical studies of Iqbal are first, that they are extremely appreciative of Iqbal almost to the point of being celebratory, and second, that they have mostly been published in Pakistan.¹⁶ This is understandable, because Iqbal is much more than merely an intellectual for Pakistan. He is best known not as a religious philosopher but as the spiritual father, and foremost proponent of the idea of Pakistan as an independent Muslim country, although it is claimed that he is not actually the real 'father' of this idea.¹⁷

An example of the uncritical and highly appreciative treatment of Iqbal can be observed in A. K. Brohi's article 'Iqbal as a Philosopher-Poet'. Brohi writes: 'And Iqbal is significant to us precisely because nobody has served more than he has the cause of Islam – he is, for us, the mouthpiece of Muslim destiny as it articulates itself in our own day.'¹⁸ This suggestion by Brohi is an exaggeration of Iqbal's status by claiming that no one has served Islam as much as Iqbal did. He also fails to justify this claim for he does not provide any arguments as to why Iqbal has 'served more' than any Muslim thinker in the history of Islam. Mumtaz Hasan presents a similar view. He writes: 'He [Iqbal] has written some of the greatest poetry ever produced in Urdu or Persian, or, indeed, in any of the other languages we know.'¹⁹ These two claims regarding Iqbal are subjective and dramatic ideas written in objective terms and are in need of justification. However, the authors provide no justification of these claims with any references or proofs. In the same article, Hasan also presents conspiracy theories about the Indian-Pakistan clash by claiming that the Indian attack on Pakistan, about which he does not give any more details of the date or the attack, consciously aimed at the two important cities in Iqbal's life. He writes: 'It is significant that the recent Indian attack on Pakistan was concentrated mainly on two cities, Sialkot and Lahore, the former being the birthplace of Iqbal, and the latter the city where he lived and died.'²⁰

Iqbal stands among the most famous of modern Muslim thinkers in Turkey as well and is a spiritual leader not only for most Pakistani scholars but also for scholars who write in Turkish. An overview of the literature on Iqbal in Turkish

shows that he is an immensely famous figure, particularly among religious people and especially religious conservatives. Yet in spite of his popularity there, there are few serious studies on Iqbal in Turkish either. Only a few of Iqbal's poems have been translated into Turkish. Furthermore, until 2013, there had been two different versions of the Turkish translations of Iqbal's main prose work *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*. However, these translations include a number of mistakes, and even omit some sentences present in the original English text. This, unsurprisingly, has presented problems for researchers wanting to study Iqbal in Turkish. In 2013 a new translation of the work was published which is much more satisfactory than the previous versions.²¹

Iqbal's popularity is not limited to Pakistan and Turkey; he has also been highly influential among intellectuals in Iran. Ali Shariati, the well-known Iranian revolutionist and sociologist of twentieth-century Iran, is among these intellectuals.²² The extent of Iqbal's fame at least in the three centres of the Muslim world raises the question of why he is so popular and influential. Although it is not among the main concerns of this research, it is hoped that this study may also provide an insight into the question of the source of Iqbal's outstanding popularity and an answer will be offered in the conclusion of this book.

Of the few critical works on Iqbal two main stances towards Iqbal can be distinguished. The first type of critical stance includes approaches in which the value of Iqbal's philosophical thought is highlighted. An example of this kind of approach can be found in Fazlur Rahman's two short articles 'Iqbal's Idea of Progress'²³ and 'Iqbal's Idea of the Muslim'.²⁴ Rahman claims that Iqbal is a thinker who is highly misunderstood and misinterpreted, and regards this as the 'post-humous tyranny of interpretation'.²⁵ As a result of being misunderstood, Rahman believes, Iqbal's thought has become representative of various types of ideologies ranging from 'naked Communism' to a 'crass conservatism'.²⁶ The main reason for Iqbal's readers' interpreting his thought in different and even opposite directions is, for Rahman, the difficulty of formulating the main issue of his thought, that is, the creation of a new understanding of the ideal Muslim who is aware of his capabilities.²⁷ 'Otherwise' he writes, 'it does and has appeared to people not only mutually inconsistent but downright contradictory'.²⁸ From Rahman's point of view a further reason for Iqbal's philosophy appearing to be a collection of contradictions is that Iqbal 'operates by "*ishq*" [love] rather than by "*aql*" [reason]'.²⁹ This means that Iqbal produces his philosophy in the light of his deep emotions and inspirations rather than his reason. Only when Iqbal's readers grasp Iqbal's genuine and actual thesis, Rahman claims, will they realize that the contradictions are not genuine contradictions but only apparent contradictions:

Only when his central thesis is worked out clearly and stated satisfactorily will every statement that he made on every individual subject fall into a true perspective and receive its due importance and meaning. Otherwise his utterances are likely to appear and have, indeed, appeared to many, a juxtaposition of contradictions.³⁰

Thus, what Rahman suggests is that Iqbal's readers are responsible for the problems and contradictions in Iqbal's philosophy, but not Iqbal himself. In other words, it is not Iqbal's task to be clear and understandable: 'Such a statement of Iqbal's pivotal thesis cannot be expected to be found in Iqbal himself.'³¹ Rahman admits that Iqbal's philosophy lacks clarity of formulation, but accuses Iqbal's readers of not understanding him correctly, and misinterpreting him, and therefore making his philosophy appear to be contradictory. By saying '[t]he primary reason is that Iqbal is a thinker and not an interpreter',³² he ignores Iqbal's role in this problem. Furthermore, Rahman does not go on to consider how Iqbal's lack of clarity and the false interpretations it produces might be corrected and how his philosophy should be approached. The attempt to clarify Iqbal's thought and identify the problematic lines in it will be one of the aims of this book.

Fazlur Rahman's defensive approach to Iqbal's philosophy can be contrasted with a further type of stance towards Iqbal. These critics hold that the problems in Iqbal's philosophy arise from the weaknesses of his intellectual and philosophical character since Iqbal is a poet rather than a philosopher. An example of this kind of criticism can be found in Wilfred Cantwell Smith's two sections on Iqbal in his work *Modern Islam in India*,³³ entitled 'Iqbal the Progressive' and 'Iqbal the Reactionary'. He explains his reasons for dealing with Iqbal in these terms and approaching him from two opposite angles as follows:

This is because to integrate his divergences would be misleading. His influence has not been single. The progressives read and follow only his progressiveness. The conservatives read, and can understand, only what urges them to more vigorous conservatism, or to overt reaction. *In Iqbal's uncoordinated effusions, one can find whatever one wills – except static contentment.*³⁴

The last sentence above can be regarded as the central point in Cantwell Smith's critique of Iqbal. For him, Iqbal's philosophy lacks a constant and consistent direction. Throughout his study Cantwell Smith regards the contradictory points of Iqbal's philosophy not as ordinary 'divergences' but as an outcome of his way of presenting his ideas. This is because for Cantwell Smith, Iqbal is, before anything else, a poet, not a philosopher. He writes: 'He [Iqbal] was a poet, not a systematic thinker; and he did not hesitate to contradict himself.'³⁵ Cantwell Smith implies by his view that Iqbal is a poet who is under the influence of his emotions rather than his reason, and on this point he agrees with Rahman. Another reason for Iqbal's intellectual failure, for Cantwell Smith, is that Iqbal's economic and sociological solutions to the problems faced by the Muslim world are not based on any knowledge of economics and sociology.³⁶ For Smith, Iqbal directs his readers on subjects in which he does not have any expertise. Inevitably Iqbal's readers or followers will sooner or later fail to understand him. Cantwell Smith writes:

Iqbal stirred the Muslims and pointed out to them the goal; but not being aware of the path to it, he left himself and his followers open to being

misled by anyone interested in misleading them provided he could talk the same jargon.³⁷

Cantwell Smith's critique of Iqbal should be considered in the light of the fact that he regards Iqbal as a poet rather than a prose writer, and that he implies that the logic of poetry allows for making bold contradictions. However, it is clear that, either because of Iqbal's readers or his literary style, Fazlur Rahman and Wilfred Cantwell Smith both agree that Iqbal's philosophy appears to be contradictory, and that Iqbal does not formulate his thought with sufficient clarity. They both also believe that Iqbal's method is more emotion-based than rational. However, whereas Rahman blames Iqbal's readers for creating the contradictions in his thought as a result of misunderstanding him, and, therefore, presents a defensive critique of Iqbal, Cantwell Smith believes that the contradictions and ambiguities in Iqbal's philosophy were mainly because of Iqbal's dominant poetic character and lack of philosophical skills, as well as his ignorance of sociology and economics, i.e. it is a criticism of neglect. These criticisms of Iqbal are not entirely right although they are correct on some points. Rahman is correct in stating that Iqbal's central theme is difficult to formulate. He also rightly considers that his thought appears to be a 'juxtaposition of contradictions'. However, his accusations that it is Iqbal's readers rather than Iqbal himself who are guilty of misunderstanding Iqbal are highly debatable. Rahman, by blaming Iqbal's readers, ignores Iqbal's role in these misunderstandings or misinterpretations. Rahman overlooks the fact that it is usually Iqbal's philosophical stance that directs his readers to different and inconsistent directions, and leads them away from his central theme.

Cantwell Smith is correct in his claim that Iqbal was neither an economist nor a sociologist, and that Iqbal was unable to provide solutions in these areas to his readers. However, contrary to what Cantwell Smith holds, Iqbal's philosophical character is more dominant than his poetic aspect, despite the fact that he is not a systematic philosopher. Iqbal claims that he writes poems not merely for artistic reasons or for aesthetic pleasure, as will be examined more closely later, but as a means of expressing his philosophical thought in a way which Indian society would be more interested in reading. Moreover, in his letters, as reported by Faruqi, Iqbal himself says that poetry has a secondary position in his intellectual career, and even he has nothing to do with poetry.³⁸ Moreover, Cantwell Smith is not completely correct in claiming that Iqbal showed his followers a way which he did not know. Actually, Iqbal did not show a clear way to his followers. Consequently, the reason for the problems of Iqbal's philosophical thought is more serious and more hidden than Cantwell Smith imagines. Cantwell Smith approaches Iqbal from one aspect, namely from the sociological point of view, but, from this point of view he goes on to make judgements about the whole of Iqbal's philosophy.

Neither of these works discussed deal with the problems of Iqbal's thought in detail, nor do they attempt to dispel the contradictions of his thought. They identify the tensions in Iqbal's philosophy but make no attempt to resolve these

tensions. How such a resolution could be achieved is one of the concerns of this book. To achieve this, it will be necessary to apply an insight from Kierkegaard to Iqbal's thinking.

The review of the literature on Iqbal and Kierkegaard

The literature dealing with Iqbal and Kierkegaard can be divided into two groups. The first group consists of works which make a direct comparison between Iqbal and Kierkegaard. In this group can be included Ghulam Sabir's book *Kierkegaard and Iqbal: Startling Resemblances* and Abraham Khan's two articles 'Kierkegaard and Iqbal on Becoming a Genuinely Existing Self' and 'Muhammad Iqbal and Kierkegaard's "Judge William"'. The second group consists of the studies dealing with Iqbal and Kierkegaard indirectly, namely through Iqbal's relation to existentialism. Erfan's *Iqbal, Existentialism and Other Articles* and Syed Latif Hussain Kazmi's *Philosophy of Iqbal (Iqbal and Existentialism)* fall into this group. These two works also include comparative accounts on Kierkegaard and Iqbal; however, their main content is the comparison between Iqbal's thought and Western existentialism.

Ghulam Sabir's work is particularly significant for the present research because it is the only full-length study on Iqbal and Kierkegaard. Despite the fact that it is the only extensive study in the field it suffers from serious problems. The author does not point out the purpose of his study, but says in the preface that it is an expression of his love of Kierkegaard and Iqbal.³⁹ Moreover, as he suggests throughout the book, he aims to eliminate the differences between different cultures and religions in order for them to live peacefully. Sabir writes: 'We can illuminate our hearts, remove our differences, convert our disintegration into integration, understand the conception of *self* as taught to us by both of them, and thus live a life of unity within plurality.'⁴⁰

His belief that in order to live peacefully the differences between different cultures should be removed is open to debate. However, it is not acceptable to distort both Iqbal and Kierkegaard for the sake of his understanding of living 'a life of unity within plurality', as Sabir does:

The mission of Kierkegaard and Iqbal, to put it simply, is to unite the humanity and to make it understood that the human beings on earth belong to one single family. The purpose behind our creation is one, our destiny is one, our God is one and the teaching of religion is one.⁴¹

Anyone who is familiar with the thought of Kierkegaard or Iqbal can see that Sabir's statements above must be a misreading and misinterpretation of both. Both Iqbal and Kierkegaard were extremely religious persons. Kierkegaard believed that Christianity is the ultimate truth, and the human being's task is to become a genuine Christian, and Iqbal believed in Islam, and that the ultimate task of the human being is to become a genuine Muslim self. Actually both Iqbal and Kierkegaard can be regarded as conservative religious personalities in this

respect. It is impossible for them to suggest that the god of different religions is the same or the teachings of all religions are one. Even if it is assumed that the author tries to imply that both Iqbal and Kierkegaard believe that the various religions could be regarded as different stages on the journey towards one and the same God, this would not be a correct claim. In Kierkegaardian terms the only way to the real God is to acknowledge the paradox of the incarnation. Islam falls into the category of a kind of general religiousness, 'Religiousness A', which does not acknowledge the paradox of incarnation. On the other hand, Christian belief in the paradox cannot be reconciled with Islamic faith, which puts, in the centre of its teaching, the belief of the 'oneness of God' (*tawhid*), a doctrine which Iqbal emphasizes repeatedly in his prose works and poems.

A similar distortion can be found in Sabir's claim that 'Kierkegaard agrees with Socrates that every man is in possession of Truth'.⁴² Sabir fails to understand that although Kierkegaard's pseudonym Johannes Climacus takes this proposition as the starting point for his discussion, he does so in order to show that human beings ultimately discover through their failed attempts to recover this supposedly innate truth that they are in reality in the *untruth*. This is actually a central issue in Kierkegaard's understanding of genuine Christianity, and Sabir's claim arises from a superficial reading of Kierkegaard's *Philosophical Fragments*.

Again Sabir says:

One, however, can begin with the 'endeavour to know one self and this is beginning of the dialectic of ethical existence, not its goal'. With this beginning he discovers the *self* within him; he discovers the possibility within him and can proceed forward to actuality, provided he has courage enough. According to Kierkegaard this is self-reflection.⁴³

Here, it is difficult to identify whether the notion of 'self-reflection' is the author's own term or a Kierkegaardian term. 'Self-reflection' is indeed a Kierkegaardian notion, but he does not use it in terms of Sabir's discussion above. Kierkegaard's pseudonym Climacus discusses the notion in terms of 'pure thinking' and 'thought', and the notion generally refers to human thought's thinking about thinking.⁴⁴ On the other hand, in the above-mentioned paragraph 'self-reflection' refers broadly to the individual's reflecting on his self and it is difficult to say that Kierkegaard calls this 'self-reflection'. The problem is that Sabir does not usually make references to Kierkegaard's works and seldom provides footnotes or endnotes, so this makes it difficult to substantiate.

After those statements, Sabir continues:

Once the individual assumes responsibility it is the courage in him and the force of his passion that carry him towards the final goal, and the final goal of [the] Ego is the individual's direct relationship with the Divine Ego.⁴⁵

It is highly debatable, however, whether Kierkegaard subscribes to the notion of the human being's *direct relationship* with the Divine Ego. Kierkegaard's

emphasis on indirect communication, his rejection of objective conceptions of God, his understanding of the incarnation as a paradox that shatters human reason, and his conception of faith as 'movement by virtue of the absurd' place in question Sabir's description of the individual's goal as being that of sustaining a *direct* relationship with the Divine Ego.

Another problem regarding Sabir's study is that his work includes too many superficial comparative remarks and as a result lacks critical insight. It is difficult to quote all of the remarks of this kind since his study includes too many of them, however, the examples below which Sabir writes in a section entitled 'Ideological Kinship among Kierkegaard & Iqbal' illustrate the point clearly:

Kierkegaard and Iqbal remained apart from the girls whom they really loved. They actually had sacrificed their personal desires since both of them had a greater task ahead and did not marry the girls whom they once loved so deeply.⁴⁶

Both [i.e. Kierkegaard and Iqbal] possess unshaken power of faith and never cared if the whole world stood against them.⁴⁷

Both of them are staunch religious persons and reformers. Whatever Kierkegaard has done for Christianity Iqbal has done the same for Islam. Their approach to religion and God is realistic.⁴⁸

The quotations above epitomize Sabir's main stance throughout his work. He presents a very broad approach, does not enter into any deeper discussion of the thought of Iqbal and Kierkegaard, and does not engage in any detail with Iqbal and Kierkegaard. The underlying reason for this problem is that, for Sabir, Iqbal and Kierkegaard are great thinkers and, for him, being great means that they are not subject to criticism. An illustration of this deferential approach is provided by a passage in which Sabir discusses Hegel and Kierkegaard:

It is also not our contention to criticize one or the other, or make one of them as our hero. To us both Hegel and Kierkegaard are great philosophers of the world. As to the greatness of their thought both of them devoted their whole lives to the reform of mankind and have left a treasure, the essence of their intellect, for the guidance of our generations to come.⁴⁹

This quotation is interesting in so far as it discloses Sabir's criteria of what constitutes a great philosopher: great philosophers are those who devote themselves to the reform of humankind and help the next generations. Those thinkers accorded the title of 'great philosopher' appear for Sabir to be immune from criticism. The resulting superficiality of Sabir's treatment of Kierkegaard and Iqbal highlights the need for a more sustained *critical* engagement with the thought of these two thinkers, which is the aim of this book.

Fortunately, there is another comparative work on Iqbal and Kierkegaard, which avoids the problems of Sabir's approach and which makes a contribution to understanding the relation between Iqbal and Kierkegaard. A more rigorous approach is apparent in Abraham H. Khan's recently published article 'Muhammad Iqbal and Kierkegaard's "Judge William"'. The author examines Iqbal's *The Secrets of the Self*, *Mysteries of the Selflessness*, and the last lectures of *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* on the one hand, and the second volume of Kierkegaard's *Either/Or* on the other. Unlike the works reviewed previously, Khan makes a clear statement at the beginning of his article, and says that his aim is 'to begin a conversation between the two men by examining a couple of their earliest works that deal with the concept of the responsible self'.⁵⁰ He begins with an investigation of the signs of three elements in Iqbal's former poem *The Secrets of the Self*, namely romantic, Hegelian, and mystical implications. Khan's article is a significant study in the fields of Iqbal and Kierkegaard studies, because Khan is the first to develop a relation between Iqbal and Kierkegaard in a higher level in terms of his proper use of references, footnotes, etc. So, it should be separated from the works reviewed above. The article analyses Iqbal's notion of the self in Iqbal's works and presents a careful examination of the issue. Khan's articles make an important contribution to the rigorous academic study of Iqbal and Kierkegaard. They thus constitute a significant advance on Sabir's hagiographical approach. Khan's study, however, is naturally limited by the confines imposed on his work by the article format and consequently lacks comprehensiveness. In this book my intention is to build on and take further the type of approach evinced by Khan's work and to provide the first sustained, full-length, academic study of Iqbal in relation to Kierkegaard.

The second group of works on Iqbal and Kierkegaard, namely Erfan's *Iqbal, Existentialism and Other Articles* and Kazmi's *Philosophy of Iqbal (Iqbal and Existentialism)* consist of the studies dealing with these two thinkers through their relation to existentialism. An example of this type of comparison of Iqbal and Kierkegaard is Erfan's *Iqbal, Existentialism, and Other Articles* consisting of three articles, namely 'Points of Resemblance', 'Points of Difference', and 'Iqbal on Social Problems'. By 'Other Articles' the author must have intended 'Iqbal on Social Problems', since this third article has nothing to do with existentialism and Iqbal's relation to it. In relation to the first two articles, which actually connected to each other, while Erfan deals with the 'points of resemblance' in fifty-five pages, he focuses on the 'points of difference' in only nine pages. This is mainly because the author is more focused on finding mutual points between existentialists and Iqbal. However, the problem is that his work includes a number of misleading remarks on existentialist thinkers, particularly on Kierkegaard. He writes: 'Kierkegaard is of the view that direct communication is appropriate for objective thinking and indirect communication is appropriate for objective knowledge.'⁵¹ The purpose of indirect communication for Kierkegaard is actually to lead the human being to subjectivity by making him aware of the invalidity of any kind of objectivity in the realm of existence. One of the reasons for Erfan's misleading remark on Kierkegaard is most probably that

Kierkegaard's theory of indirect communication entails the receiver's subjective involvement in the act of communication whereas Iqbal makes a particular focus on objective knowledge gained through religious experience involving subjectivity, an issue which shall be discussed in Chapter 4. Another reason for Erfan's problematic interpretation might be that the author does not have a sufficient idea of Kierkegaard's view of indirect communication. Erfan's argument here is quite simply erroneous. Another problem with Erfan's work is that while comparing Iqbal with existentialists he refers to such existentialist thinkers as Marcel, Sartre, Jaspers, Heidegger and Kierkegaard, but makes almost no reference to Nietzsche, despite the fact that Iqbal frequently cites Nietzsche in his works, and he states his appreciation of Nietzsche by calling him 'a modern prophet'.⁵²

A further example of this kind of comparison between Iqbal and Kierkegaard can be seen in Kazmi's *Philosophy of Iqbal (Iqbal and Existentialism)*, which includes discussions on the resemblances and differences between Iqbal's philosophy and Western existentialism. A weakness of Kazmi's study, however, is his failure to indicate the *purpose* of his comparison of Iqbal's thought with existentialism. A further problem is the inadequacy of Kazmi's brief comparison of Iqbal and Kierkegaard. He writes:

Iqbal's view regarding the various stages of the development of man can be compared with Kierkegaard's theory of the three stages of life. Iqbal in his *Secrets of the Self* has mentioned three stages: (a) Subordination or obedience to moral law; (b) self-control, which is the highest form of self-consciousness or Ego-hood; and (c) Divine Vicegerency. The first two stages, combined together, represent the ethical stage in Kierkegaard's theory. The third stage may be deemed synonymous with Kierkegaard's religious stage.⁵³

Kazmi, however, is wrong in his claim that the first stage in Iqbal's notion of 'the development of man' is the obedience to *moral law*. Iqbal himself says that the first stage is the obedience to *Islamic law*, including the basic practical principles of Islam such as praying, fasting, pilgrimage and almsgiving.⁵⁴ Later on, Iqbal develops these stages and says that, as will be examined in more detail, the first stage does not include any rational understanding, but only an unquestioned obedience. Following the moral law, on the other hand, may include the individual's obeying the norms of society such as marriage etc., and an example of this kind of obedience to moral law can be found in Judge William, Kierkegaard's representative of the ethical stage.⁵⁵ In none of Iqbal's works does he say that the first stage is the individual's obedience to 'moral law', and since the author did not state where he obtained this idea, it is impossible to know whether he misread or misunderstood Iqbal's words. Islam as a world-view definitely includes moral and ethical teachings, however, Iqbal's first stage does not include the establishment of a world-view yet. Iqbal is interestingly clear and direct at this point and he leaves no room for any misunderstanding. Kazmi

seems to distort Iqbal in order to associate Iqbal's first stage with Kierkegaard's sphere of the ethical, and therefore support his argument. A further problem regarding the statements above can be seen in Kazmi's way of relating Iqbal's stages of 'the development of man' and Kierkegaard's 'theory of the three stages'. He is correct in claiming that Iqbal and Kierkegaard's stages can be compared. This is mainly because all of these categories are concerned with human existence. More needs to be done to identify the underlying principles of the theories of existence advanced by Kierkegaard and Iqbal before a dialogue between the two thinkers can be constructed of the kind envisaged by Kazmi. In short, Kazmi has identified a topic worthy of research, but has not provided the detailed philosophical analysis required to do justice to the topic. This is something that this study will attempt to rectify.

The general problem with the comparisons discussed thus far is that the authors neither indicate the purpose of their studies of Kierkegaard and Iqbal, nor do they make clear the significance of the results that emerge from their studies. Furthermore, their largely hagiographical, deferential, and uncritical style makes it difficult to characterize these studies as genuine academic works. The result is that such treatments provide only superficial studies of Iqbal's thought and make little contribution to grasping the deeper philosophical principles upon which it is based. The importance of Sabir, Erfan and Kazmi in drawing attention to points of contact between Iqbal and Kierkegaard can be acknowledged, but at the same time it must be recognized that going beyond the superficiality of their work is necessary.

In short, the aim of this book is to fill the gap in the literature that has just been reviewed. It shall avoid uncritical and superficial comparisons between Iqbal and Kierkegaard and strive to develop a new form of relationship between them by providing a Kierkegaardian reading of Iqbal's central problem of becoming a genuine Muslim. This book is based on the claim that Iqbal's presentation of his central thesis of becoming a genuine Muslim includes a number of ambiguous notions, inconsistencies and contradictory statements, some of which are only seeming contradictions caused by Iqbal's not talking about his method as will become clear in the analysis of his use of mystical poetry. Also, this book is based on the argument that Kierkegaard's philosophical method provides a powerful tool to clarify and dispel the ambiguities and inconsistencies in Iqbal's discussion. Therefore, the aim of this book includes identifying the problematic aspects of Iqbal's presentation and discussion of his idea of how to become a genuine Muslim self as well as clarifying and uncovering the main features of this central theme of his philosophy in the light of the main principles of Kierkegaard's philosophical thought. Consequently, it is aimed to contribute to three main fields, namely to Iqbal studies which lack critical research on Iqbal; to Kierkegaard studies which require academic work on developing a relationship between Kierkegaard and any Muslim thinker; and to intercultural studies by cultivating a hermeneutical form of relationship between two major thinkers who belong to two different cultures.

Becoming a genuine Muslim self, or what Iqbal more frequently refers to as the development or education of the self particularly in his *The Secrets of the*

Self, is for him the religious ideal and highest achievement of a Muslim individual.⁵⁶ As Diagne nicely comments, it is 'the alpha and omega of Iqbal's philosophy',⁵⁷ and as Nicholson rightly suggests, for Iqbal, only by means of the development of the self can the problems of the modern Muslim world be solved.⁵⁸ He believes that the development of human self is the principal concern of Islam.⁵⁹ It can therefore be claimed that Iqbal's view of becoming a genuine Muslim self is the core of his whole philosophical thought. Indeed, if Iqbal's idea of becoming a genuine Muslim self is the most essential aspect of his thought, Kierkegaard's help will be invaluable in this study, due to both thinkers' emphasis on human existence and on becoming religious selves.

The Kierkegaardian reading of Iqbal's theory of becoming a genuine Muslim self involves using Kierkegaardian notions in order to identify, clarify and uncover Iqbal's understanding of the development of the self. Here it should be noted that cultivating a hermeneutical relationship between Iqbal and Kierkegaard does not imply that this book cannot be regarded as a comparative study, since the topic of this study is based on the comparative judgement that Iqbal and Kierkegaard show certain parallels, such as their concern with the religiousness of their societies and with the question of human existence. However, rather than simply comparing their thoughts, the procedure of moving from the parallels and developing a hermeneutical relationship between them will enable us to dispel the apparent contradictions Iqbal presents and clarify the terminological problems with Kierkegaard's help. This will enable us to clear away the tensions and inconsistencies in Iqbal's thought and will help identify what significance, if any, his philosophy of the self still has today. In doing so it will be necessary to attend to the following problems that any researcher making a study of Iqbal's philosophy faces and where a Kierkegaardian hermeneutics will be applied. These can be summarized as follows:

- 1 Iqbal's philosophy can be regarded as a philosophy of activism: he establishes his philosophical thought with the aim of producing concrete changes and results in the outer world, which he summarizes in such statements as, 'it is your task to create the new world'⁶⁰ and 'hew out a new world to your own desire!'⁶¹ Such results and changes in the outer world or the creation of a new world require the human being's physical action that help him develop his personality and self, and 'save it from corruption'.⁶² Iqbal points out the problems of the Muslim world, and highlights the importance of becoming a genuine Muslim self in the creation of the ideal Muslim world. The problem is that he does not provide his followers with a clear statement of how to achieve these goals. In other words, Iqbal is very careful at pointing out *what* to do, but less interested in showing *how* to do it. An example of this can be seen in his emphasis of the notion of 'action'. Iqbal divides human actions into two groups, namely self-sustaining actions and self-dissolving actions, or ego-sustaining actions and ego-dissolving actions.⁶³ For him, the ideal of the human being is to develop his self through self-sustaining actions, which will help him in the creation of a new world.

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